



# Inside Congress

*by United States Representative George R. Nethercutt, Jr.*

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**For the week ending July 12, 2002**

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Welcome to this week's edition of Inside Congress. I am glad to share with you a little of my work in the national legislature. Please follow the listed links or contact my office for more information on the topics mentioned here.

## **HOUSE APPROVES NETHERCUTT BILL TO STUDY SPOKANE VALLEY AQUIFER**

This week the House of Representatives passed a bill I introduced to authorize funding for a comprehensive study of the land providing Spokane's drinking water.

The three-year, \$3.5 million study of the Rathdrum Prairie-Spokane Valley Aquifer is needed so that we can manage the only source for Spokane's drinking water in the most responsible way possible.

The study will develop a comprehensive computer model that will provide a scientifically defensible understanding of the regional aquifer in both states. Washington's Spokane County and Idaho's Kootenai County manage the aquifer very differently, in part because the limited and sometimes conflicting data on the aquifer can be interpreted in many ways. A study would provide data for the entities to reach a common understanding, seen by many as key to protecting the drinking water of thousands in the Inland Northwest, as well as making sure that jobs aren't kept out of the area due to a 10-year wait for water rights.

This study will help us create a win-win situation for the environment and the economy here.

## **HOUSE PASSES NETHERCUTT AMENDMENT TO ACCELERATE AND EXPAND ARMING PILOTS, MAKE PROGRAM PERMANENT**

This week the House approved an amendment I introduced to H.R. 4635, the Arming Pilots Against Terrorism Act. The bill would enable trained, qualified airline pilots to voluntarily choose to carry a gun on a plane. My amendment speeds up the implementation of the program by two months, allows *all* pilots to voluntarily participate instead of just 2 percent of pilots, and makes the program permanent.

I believe that arming pilots is a strong deterrent to terrorism, and wanted to make sure that any legislation would not cripple the program from the start. Armed pilots are the

last line of defense for passengers, and without my amendment, the bill would have left 98 percent of aircraft undefended. If we really believe arming pilots can be a deterrent to terrorism, it should be a permanent, system-wide program. Any pilot that is trained and eligible should not be denied the ability to fully protect his passengers. This additional layer of security will protect all Americans and will deter potential hijackers.

### **APPROPRIATIONS COMMITTEE APPROVES NETHERCUTT AMENDMENT BLOCKING RELEASE OF DATA CRITICAL TO FIGHTING VIOLENT CRIME**

The House Appropriations Committee approved an amendment I introduced that is critical to solving criminal investigations involving guns, and also protects the privacy of gun owners. The amendment to the Treasury-Postal Operations Appropriations bill prohibits the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco and Firearms (ATF) from using available funds to disclose firearms tracing data. The ATF, which receives 200,000 trace data requests annually, uses the information for three primary purposes: to identify criminals for prosecution, to target gun traffickers, and to place local guns involved in a crime in a regional or national context.

This data must remain protected to ensure the integrity of criminal investigations, but unfortunately a recent U.S. Circuit Court decision could compel law enforcement agencies to disclose this data, contrary to Freedom of Information Act law, privacy protections and Supreme Court precedent in this area. Law enforcement officials caution that releasing this data would hinder and even jeopardize criminal investigations.

My amendment ensures the integrity of criminal and intelligence investigations, and protects the safety of investigators, witnesses, informants that might otherwise be in jeopardy of unwarranted disclosure. Next week the House of Representatives will consider this measure as part of the Treasury-Postal Operations spending bill.

### **LEGISLATION**

This week I became a cosponsor of H.R. 3320, the Lifetime Annuity Payout Act, introduced by Rep. Phil English of Pennsylvania. This bill would lower taxes on a lifetime annuity plan by 18-28 percent.

I also signed a letter to the Senate Democratic leadership strongly urging them to take up the Arming Pilots Against Terrorism Act.

### **ON THE FLOOR**

Here is a recap of the legislative activity for the week:

**H.R. 4609**, Funding to study the Spokane Valley-Rathdrum Prairie Aquifer. The bill passed by a vote of 340-9. I voted yes.

The bill authorizes \$3.5 million for the Department of Interior to conduct a study on the Spokane Valley-Rathdrum Prairie Aquifer over three years. Please see above for more information.

**H.R. 4635**, Arming Pilots Against Terrorism Act. The bill passed by a vote of 310-113. I voted yes. Please see above for more information.

## **SCHEDULE**

I attended the Science Coalition Breakfast of Champions where I was awarded the "Champion of Science" award. I attended a classified briefing by the Departments of Defense and State, and the Joint Chiefs of Staff on the War on Terrorism.

I spoke to college students participating in the Fund for American Studies program about the legislative process. I participated in the markup of the Homeland Security Act of 2002 in the Science Committee. I met with Doug Sutherland, Washington State Commissioner of Public Lands regarding forest and fish issues. I attended a Science Committee hearing on the Bush Administration's climate change initiative. I met with Dr. Ken Casavant of the Washington State Department of Transportation regarding ways to ensure that freight in America is safe from threats of terrorism.

I also participated in full Appropriations Committee meetings to consider and approve the Treasury-Postal Operations, Interior, Agriculture spending bills.

Over the Independence Day work period I toured the Border Patrol Facility on Newport Highway, met with Chuck Reisenauer of the Spokane Police Department, and spoke to employees at Altek, located in Liberty Lake.

## **CONTACT INFORMATION:**

I always enjoy hearing from you. Please feel free to contact me if I can be of assistance to you in any matter. Here are some of the ways you may reach me, especially if you know of others who may want to receive this report each week:

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